

*ASI President Joseph Nino
2017 / Convocation Remarks*

Good morning, everyone. Thank you, Provost Jersky, for the introduction and thank you, President Conoley, for inviting me here today to address such a prestigious group. Once again, my name is Joe Nino and I am the 2017-2018 ASI president. I am a sport psychology major and one day I hope to join you in higher education and give back to the system that changed my life.

I'd like to take this opportunity today to talk to you about obstacles. As we all know, students are facing the greatest of obstacles just to attend this university; myself included. Our students are overworked, overextended and often times underrepresented. Three quarters of our students are working over 20 hours a week. One in 10 is homeless or housing insecure, one in five is food insecure, and too often students leave here without a degree. Speaking to my struggles, I personally have had to choose between buying textbooks and skipping meals. I've had to work multiple jobs just to make ends meet. I've missed classes, failed a few, and during my pursuits have had to drop out. That path definitely was not the formula for student success I had imagined when I decided to pursue an education.

At the age of 16 I was diagnosed with an incurable autoimmune disease. Every day was and still is a struggle with my health. Paying for health insurance was unrealistic. Medication costs alone were more than my rent. My health and mental state were an absolute rollercoaster. As much as I tried to obtain an education, my body wasn't having it. Luckily, I decided to take a holistic approach with my health. I changed my eating habits and made drastic lifestyle changes. It started to work. The pain subsided and ultimately, I began to feel optimistic.

I was *resilient* in pursuing an education. And today I have the privilege to stand before you as an associate degree holder from Cerritos College, a former president of my honors society, and most importantly to me, a dedicated student advocate. My experience with facing adversity has translated into a passion for helping other students succeed. That's why I'm proud to be a part of an organization like Associated Students, Inc. which shares the same philosophy as me. We keep students first. ASI continues to take massive steps to serve more students; the food insecure through our ASI Beach Pantry; undocumented and international students by recently securing \$10,000 in scholarships, and the

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underrepresented through our establishing of a Social Justice and Equity Committee aimed at proactively representing student groups who feel marginalized or unheard. These efforts, to help more students overcome more obstacles, are the collective legacy of Long Beach State students.

At the end of the day, I believe we *all* play an important role in student advocacy; ASI in our diligence to promote and foster self and shared governance; faculty and staff as you continue to be champions for students in and outside of the classroom; and university administration as you continue to push for programs and resources that ensure inclusive excellence. Each of us are often putting students first and speaking on their behalf at every opportunity. But sometimes we must recognize that being a student advocate is not always about speaking for students, sometimes all we need to do is provide students the platform to speak for themselves. Thank you all for providing me this platform today and helping *this* student speak for himself. As we look into the future, let's ask ourselves how we all can continue to be better student advocates and break down those barriers!

And as always, GO BEACH!